11-26-96

Specter on Mideast negotiation loop

The senator reportedly carried a message from Netanyahu to Assad that urged resumption of talks.

ASSOCIATED PRESS.

JERUSALEM — Sen. Arlen Specter shuttled between the Israeli and Syrian capitals yesterday in an apparent effort to revive stalled peace talks between the two countries.

A senior Syrian official, meanwhile, said Israel was demanding Arab "surrender" in its terms for peace, and suggested Syria was prepared for war if the deadlock continued.

Specter, a Republican from Pennsylvania who is chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, met yesterday morning with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu before flying to Damascus to meet with Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, U.S. Embassy spokesman Richard Scorza said.

Specter returned to Israel late yesterday and was to meet with Netanyahu again today, Israel Radio said.

Scorza said he could not provide details of Specter's visit.

Israel army radio said Netanyahu sent a message with the senator to Assad urging him to renew the talks immediately. Netanyahu said recently that he believed talks could be resumed by January, if not before.

Talks between Israel and Syria have been stalled since last spring, but relations have soured since Netanyahu's government took office in June. The previous government had reportedly given Syria tacit agreement to a deal exchanging the Golan Heights for peace, which Netanyahu has not adopted.

Syria demands the return of the Golan, captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast War, and has insisted that Israel commit to that in exchange for peace before the talks could resume.

In Damascus, a senior member of Assad's ruling Baath Party said Syria was prepared to use other means to reclaim the Golan if the peace process did not produce results. He did not say what they were.

"Israel wants the Arabs to surrender and to accept the status quo in the peace it wants," Tawfiq Salha told a meeting of Syria's Communist Party. "This will never happen."

"Should the peace process fail, Syria will not accept the continuation of occupation of its land and will work to liberate it in the way it finds suitable," he said.